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ABSTRACT

Augustana University College (Alberta, Canada) offers a senior-level outdoor pursuits course called Arctic Canoe Expeditions, open to any student with a previous canoe-based outdoor course. Course goals are for students to apply knowledge from previous outdoor courses, integrate knowledge from their home disciplines into the experience, explore a special part of Canada, experience one of the world's last vast wilderness areas, create their own experience, and gain knowledge of Arctic canoe expeditions. During the winter semester, the class meets weekly to prepare for the trip, with students taking substantial responsibility for trip planning. Students are expected to keep a personal journal; to design their own learning experience, integrating their home discipline with expedition activities; and to make a class presentation of their learning. Considerable time is spent establishing group norms and expectations. The expedition itself involves 10 students and 2 professors spending at least 21 days on an isolated northern river unfamiliar to all participants. Pairs of students take 48-hour turns as facilitators of group decision making. The group keeps a group journal and holds formal debriefings every 3-4 days. The course builds on the philosophy of experiential education by providing students with interesting and relevant "indeterminate situations of consequence" that have high probability of successful resolution. The interdisciplinary nature of the course adds richness and depth to this resolution. (SV)

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AUGUSTANA ARCTIC ADVENTURES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPEDITION

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Abstract
This paper describes an interdisciplinary and experiential course offered at Augustana University College. The paper's objectives are to share the story of the course and a vision of how an interdisciplinary and experiential approach to education can add richness and depth to experience.

In late July 1990 I was hiking in the Coppermine Mountains along the Coppermine River north of the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories (NWT) of Canada. It was nearing the end of a 25-day canoe trip that seven friends and I had been planning together for more than six months. It struck me on that day how powerful and meaningful this experience had been for our group in so many ways: interpersonally, environmentally, as an adventure, in the planning and preparation. We had all gained a great deal of satisfaction from the whole experience, learning many lessons and gaining many insights. I can remember walking back to the river and wondering how I might provide similar experiences for students in the future. At that time I was on an energetic quest to make a career of teaching at a university or college in outdoor and experiential education. The goals of this paper are fourfold: first, to share the story of this course and how it is an adventure approach to personal growth (GROWTH) and integrates field experience into programs (MATURATION); second, to share my vision of how adventure and experiential learning can be joined in an interdisciplinary fashion to add richness and depth to such an experience; third, to inspire others to seek and dream visions of unique program possibilities and lastly, to encourage information and idea exchange between people involved in similar programs.

Course Overview

This paper addresses one specific course, Physical Education 287/387, Arctic Canoe Expeditions, offered by the Division of Physical Education at Augustana University College, a liberal arts and sciences university of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. This university is a community committed to teaching excellence, concerned for the development of the whole person and open to students of all traditions. Students can obtain degrees with majors in 20 different subject areas, one of which is physical education. Within the physical education department, Augustana has a strong program and tradition in outdoor pursuits. Students in this program learn leadership skills, communication skills, and small group living skills, as well as skills specific to certain outdoor activities such as canoeing, backpacking, winter survival and mountain ski touring. They also study the foundations of outdoor, adventure and experiential education. This combination of courses provides students with a rare opportunity for personal insight and awareness of their individual strengths and weakness and how those might contribute to their future success. This is a senior level course open to students from across campus who have completed at least one junior level canoe-based outdoor pursuits course.

The specific goals of this course are to provide students with an opportunity to:

1. apply skills and knowledge, including self (intrapersonal), people (interpersonal) and work (technical) (Benson, 1991), learned in introductory outdoor pursuits courses;
2. integrate knowledge from their home disciplines into the experience
3. discover and explore a very special part of Canada, its people, landscape and flora and fauna;
4. experience one of the last vast wilderness areas of the world and gain an understanding of the role and value of wilderness in society;
5. have substantial input into the creation and shaping of their own experience (the professors' role is primarily one of facilitation);
6. gain experience and knowledge related to the many aspects of planning, preparation and implementation of Arctic canoe expeditions.

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Selecting students for this course has proven to be a sometimes painful process. There are only 10 spots available in order to maintain a group size which allows for the desired group experience to develop, for logistical and river safety reasons, as well as budget constraints. The course is co-taught by Dr. Dave Larson, Professor of Biology, and me, resulting in a total group size of 12. During the selection process, an equal number of men and women is sought and representation of many different faculties is desirable.

The course has three distinct parts: weekly evening classes of planning and preparation during the winter semester from January to April, a warm-up paddling weekend in June, and the expedition itself during the summer.

The class has a formal weekly meeting during the winter semester from January to April in order to plan and prepare for the trip which includes: selecting a river, establishing group norms and expectations, studying different aspects of the chosen river and region, as well as preparing equipment, food and making required logistical arrangements.

In the first year of the program Dave Larson and I chose the river that we would paddle which was selected from rivers that I had previously paddled. Although it was an appropriate river, the fact that I had been there before changed the dynamic of group decision-making along the way. It caused students to not be as involved or as thorough in their map reading, route planning and river reading. To eliminate this and promote more of a shared and equal adventure we now prefer to travel a river that is new to the whole group. In selecting a river we now have each student, or pair of students, choose a river and complete a river research project which they present to the group, and based on the presentations the group collectively chooses the river. The only guidelines given are that the river must be new to the whole group; the river difficulty must be within the limits of the group; we must spend 21 days on the water; it must be in the Canadian North and be for the most part isolated wilderness and the group must be prepared to pay the aircraft charters to and from Yellowknife, or other starting point, if required, generally $1500.00 to $2000.00.

This process has proven to be quite effective in promoting a shared and equal adventure and motivating students to become completely engaged in the daily decision making, map reading, route planning and river reading. As well, it is an effective process for allowing students to learn the skills and processes involved in researching and choosing an expedition route that meets the specific needs and desires of the group.

Each student, or pair of students, is required to be primarily responsible for one aspect of the pre-trip preparation. Typical projects have included: menu planning, logistics and route planning, safety equipment and back-up plans, equipment preparation, equipment construction (students have built canoe spray decks and bug tents) and compiling the group journal. Being primarily responsible means ensuring that the jobs get done. Most students, and professors, are somehow involved in each project, especially menu planning, purchasing and packing.

Students are expected to design their own learning experience with the goal being integrating information from their home discipline with the upcoming expedition. This integration and bringing of information from many disciplines is important for creating an interdisciplinary experience. Most students choose to do a classical research paper, although the options are many. Nevertheless, all students are required to make a presentation of their learning to the class. These presentations have been the foundation for many great discussions and explorations on the expeditions themselves. Paper topics/titles have included: Inuit Traditional Religious Beliefs and the Environment; Snow Bound People Who Make Music; Traditional Use of Flora and Fauna; Behaviour of Individuals in Small Groups; The Future of the Canadian North, in Particular the Thelon Game Sanctuary; Briefing and Debriefing in Outdoor Education; Nunavat and Inuit Land Claims; The Barren Ground Caribou: Animal of the Great Herds; An Examination of Inuit Education; A Comparison of 18th and 20th Century Arctic Expeditions.

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All students are required to keep a personal journal that reflects their experience and learning during the expedition portion of the course. These journals have taken many forms with some students exercising their artistic and literary talents with drawings, sketches, poetry and song.

Considerable time is spent identifying and establishing group norms and expectations. Past expeditions have demonstrated that this is valuable time spent that leads to greater satisfaction and group harmony. As a conflict resolution tool, we use the Pinch Theory (Sherwood and Scherer, 1975). This common tool and terminology works well and encourages clarity of goals, expectations and roles. This is an ongoing process and central to debriefings. Key goals and expectations are identified early in the course to facilitate appropriate route selection.

The Expedition

The expedition itself is the central part of the experience on which everything is focused. It is also a key part of the experiential nature of the course, although certainly not the only experiential portion. It is here that students put to test all their preparatory work. Many questions are answered and many opportunities are available for reflection upon previous information studied and gathered.

The group journal has become a central part of our expedition experiences and serves several purposes: to recount and document the experience generally, a means for students to share their personal experience with each other, a thermometer of the group, a means of debriefing and a source of humour. The group journal is a shared responsibility in that everyone, professors included, is a part of the rotation for writing. The person who writes for today, for example, would choose a time to read their entry to the group tomorrow, usually at breakfast. This journal, like personal journals, has taken many forms. (Examples will be on display at the conference presentation). Once the course is over, the group journal is compiled along with other important expedition information such as menus, logistical and regional information, and each student is given a copy.

In order to engage students actively in the daily decision making and facilitation of the group we have found it necessary to identify student facilitators. We have students facilitate the group in pairs for a period of 48 hours. This has worked well and will be continued. A shorter facilitation period has led to less investment by the students. These students are responsible for ensuring the required daily decisions are being made. They each paddle in the lead canoe giving an opportunity for route finding and river reading. They are also responsible for the daily thoughts for the day which have become a cherished time for these groups. During the facilitation period the two students work closely with both professors. This allows for guaranteed quality interaction with each student several times throughout the course ensuring that students are able to achieve personal learning goals.

Formal group debriefings are sometimes long and tiresome with a group of this size yet critical for the group's success and achievement of the course goals. Formal group debriefings are held every three to four days or sooner, if needed. The debriefings have taken many formats depending on the perceived need of the group at the time.

The Strength of an Interdisciplinary and Experiential Process

In order to share my vision of how adventure and experiential learning can be joined in an interdisciplinary fashion to add richness and depth to an experience, some of the philosophical foundations of experiential education must be addressed. I will highlight a few that I feel are particularly central yet acknowledge that they do not constitute or represent the entire philosophical foundation of experiential education.

John Dewey (1981a) identifies and defines the *indeterminate situation*. He comments: "Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole" (p. 226). Dewey goes on to explain that the indeterminate situation is a necessary condition of experiential education and that to render the situation, or problem, determinate is done through a

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combination of both *primary and secondary experience*. Primary and secondary experience can simply be defined as "primary" being hands-on or "gross, macroscopic [and] crude" (Dewey, 1981b, p. 254) and "secondary" as reflective or "refined, derived objects of reflection" (p. 254). When designing this course the goal was to provide students with interesting and relevant indeterminate situations of consequence that could be rendered determinate, or solved, through interesting and relevant primary and secondary experiences of consequence.

In order to create indeterminate situations of interest, relevance and consequence, students must have a pre-requisite outdoor pursuits course and commit to a significant financial obligation. This, combined with the fact that the course is optional, ensures both student interest and the ability to see relevance in the pre-expedition activities and assignments. As a result, the indeterminate situations presented during the course have a high degree of interest, relevance and consequence. Subsequently, the probability of the students rendering the indeterminate situation determinate is also high, resulting in an educative experience.

For example, the river research project provides both primary and secondary experience. It is primary in the information gathering stage, secondary in the presentation, discussion and expedition. The relevance, in Dewey's sense of the word, is that a river will be chosen based on the information gathered and presented from this project. A poor choice could result in a poor, or even dangerous, expedition experience, or consequence. The same logic is true for all the activities and assignments of the course. The remaining question is then how the interdisciplinary nature of the course adds richness and depth. I believe, and have seen, that the variety of viewpoints and breadth of information brought to the group when solving indeterminate situations is much broader and complete when a problem is seen by a biologist, sociologist, psychologist, physical educator, music student, political scientist, geographer and religious studies major versus one of these perspectives in isolation. Therefore, although not always efficient from a time perspective, the final rendering of the indeterminate determinate is more complete and holistic. Also, by virtue of having so many perspectives of an experience, it is likely that it creates many more indeterminate situations; solving of one indeterminate situation often creates another. Imagine a group of ten students all viewing a landscape through specific disciplinary binoculars, therefore, seeing the landscape through ten unique filters. When a group begins to share their interpretations of that landscape, the final possible interpretations and assumptions will be more holistic and more complete. This is true for any indeterminate situation, at least, in my experience with this course.

Summary

I believe that the power, richness and effectiveness of this course are rooted in its interdisciplinary and experiential nature. This is a course that requires students and professor to become fully engaged in an experience that is very adventurous; this, too, is a strength. On that July afternoon in 1990 I had no idea how, where or when I might have the opportunity to provide such programs for students. It has been and exciting and rewarding journey, and one I encourage you to take.

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